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THE INDIANS— OF GUATEMALA



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The Indians of Guatemala

What is an Indian?

A little American girl on seeing two Guatemala Indian children said, "Oh Mamma, I'd like to play with those little Indians—but I'm afraid they would shoot me." Of course that idea of what an Indian is came from older people. Now if we are to understand Guatemala's people, we must divest our minds of this Modoc-Apache idea. In southwestern United States we begin to come in contact with the industrial type of Indian, and as a rule this type becomes more and more pronounced in history as we go south. In Mexico we had the Aztec and the Toltec, and in Guatemala and Honduras the still more cultured Maya. [These peoples instead of devoting their time to war and the chase, centered their interests almost exclusively upon the arts of peace. Though the fires of ancient splendor of the Maya has been blown out by the cruelty of conquest, and the abjection of servitude, the genius that once flamed so brightly still smoulders and lies latent, and awaits but the breath of oppor-

tunity to fan it again into a flame of glory.] The gentle, sympathetic, industrial character of these Indians of Mexico and Central America at once explains the possibility and blackens the perfidy of the romantic though unprovoked conquest of populous, peaceable, industrious nations by a mere handful of gold-seeking Spanish adventurers.

**Indians not
Homogeneous**

Just as in the eastern continent we have very white and very black races, dwarfs and giants and all degrees between, so in the western we have the negro Pericui of Lower California, the white Chiriguanas and Pehuenches of Brazil and Bolivia, the dwarf races of Peru and the giant people of Tierra del Fuego with all grades between. In the New World it was a brown race that attained the highest civilization, while in the Old it was a white race. It is probable that the Indians came not from one source but from several. After they had invaded, fought, amalgamated with, subjugated, chased each other hither and yon as races would and will, the curtain of history rises upon the continent revealing be-

tween 650 and 700 nations of aborigines of every variety of character, size, color, language, customs and capability. Of these over fifty are found in Central America, thirty-six in Guatemala alone. Their languages in some cases are closely related, and in others totally distinct. While Spanish is the official language and is the one most generally known, a great many Indians understand only their own tongue. The Indians in each town are very self-centered and exclusive, making it difficult for an Indian preacher from another town even though he speaks their own language to be very efficient, a condition that will be largely remedied with the first foothold that is obtained in the new town. But there should be a missionary in each nation, who could learn their language and devote himself exclusively to them.

Antiquity

Though most of the Indian nations we have any knowledge of still exist, albeit in a conquered and abject condition, their history reaches back to the conquest and we know not how much farther. The Quiches till the soil yet around

the ruins of their former mighty cities, while their legends reach far back into the mists and shadows of ages long gone by. [The Mayas have left the ruin strewn sites of their former greatness, but the neatly dressed materials of their scattered habitations, their ruined temples, their sacred artificial pyramids and their colossal memorial monoliths bear a mute and melancholy witness to their once superior engineering achievements, their architectural genius, their art that had become illustrious and grown old, their literary attainments, and their astronomical knowledge that had arranged a calendar system as perfect as our own with all our science of calculation and all our instruments of precision.] American antiquarians date these Maya ruins back to the earlier centuries of the Christian era, the Germans think they have stood for five thousand years, while the French think the sun and storms of ten milleniums have beaten upon them, yet the irrepressible Maya still holds his head up in the tempest of adversity as unmoved as the mighty monuments of his fathers, and waits for a better day.

**Peculiar
Indian
Mentality**

The mental processes of the Central American Indian seem very peculiar. He arrives at conclusions by paths so imperceptible, by such unimaginable short cuts, that it sometimes seems almost uncanny. Even their words and concepts seem cast in a different mold from ours. For example, instead of having a single word for forest, and modifying it to express its varying qualities, they use one word for a forest on a mountain, another for a forest on a slope, another in a valley, and another in a plain. When they would speak of a man as orderly or well behaved, they say he is a man who "doesn't-go-away-from-home-o'nights." Instead of saying, **Goodbye** (God be with you) they say, **Be careful not to fall down.** In complicated questions they often arrive at correct conclusions by their short mental processes, more quickly than we do with our more pretentious systematized logic. For successful work, all this must be understood by the missionary.

Indian Character

In many of the principles set forth in Utopia, Sir Thomas Moore must have been describing some of the Indian nations of Central America. The land belongs to all and is parcelled out annually. It is remarkable how in such unfavorable conditions, the Indian morality is so relatively correct, when they are not under the influence of liquor or of other races. Though he represents 70% of the population, he is charged with only 25% of the crime. In Guatemala City, where legal pressure is strongest, in 1915 the Ladino or mixed race showed an illegitimacy of 63% while the Indians had but 27%. Where drunkenness prevails the Indian illegitimacy runs much higher. The Indian is instinctively loyal, chaste, very respectful to his authorities, conscientious, religious, generous, grateful for favors, habitually industrious where he can see anything come of it, tenacious in the face of difficulties, [capable of high intellectual attainment,] artistic in temperament, in short an ideal soil for a high type of Christian culture. The Indian character itself is a ringing call for evangelization.

Indian Homes

The conquered and servile condition in which the Indians are submerged, generally precludes in the long run their having any wealth beyond what is barely necessary to keep them alive. Their houses are generally small, low, smoky, with but one unglazed window opening or oftener none at all, giving on the whole the appearance of habitations of bears or wolves rather than of human beings. They are mostly of a single room, with little or no furniture, and no regard to sanitation as we understand it. The cooking is of the simplest and crudest. Life has little for them but burden bearing and tears, yet with it all there is about them an air of stoic irrepressibility, while through it all there shines a tinge of faith in the constitution of things and a blind and indefinite hope for a better day. They do not know what it is they need, but we do.

Their Ancient Religion

Their former religion was apparently a species of occultism, witchcraft with many charms, incantations and cere-

monies. It was under the care of professional religious leaders or wizards, who by long study in occult art had familiarized themselves with the necessarily extensive religious conventionalities, and knew how to perform the intricate rites with the supposed maximum results. A complicated paraphernalia was in use. They practiced sacrificing fowls and other articles of food on the tops of the volcanoes, examining the intestines of the fowls to foretell the future of the person offering the sacrifice. Most of these practices are still followed, the Catholic Church either adopting them under a Christian name, or laughing at them.

Industrial Superstitions

Innumerable superstitions prevail covering much of industrial and domestic life. For instance, they eat white cheese when planting rice, believing that the color of the rice will be influenced by the color of the food the planter eats. When planting sweet potatoes they carry a large cow horn slung from shoulder or belt, in the belief that it will influence the size of the coming vege-

table. Large round earthenware jars are whitewashed and put on stumps in the pumpkin patches, that the ambitious pepo may see how large a well bred pumpkin is expected to grow, and do its best. They have all the superstitions our grandfathers had about planting in the right time of the moon, and a few more besides. They have innumerable remedial superstitions and practices, some of them quite heroic, and some embodying correct principles, that may have been reached or partly so by experience, as steam baths for several maladies, boiling their drinking water, etc.

Present Social and Industrial Condition

Ever since the Spanish conquest, the Indian has been the servant when not the slave of the nation. He is the public's laborer, the messenger, the burden bearer. He does the work, others enjoy the luxuries. Logs are sawed into boards by Indian power in many places because his wages are so low that the steam saw cannot compete with him. Year in and year out he carries enormous burdens beside bounding rivers because it would

cost more to harness the rivers than he gets for his toil. Many Indians are working under the peonage system for from three-fourths of a cent to six cents a day. We knew of a case where a majordomo, not under the peonage system but in voluntary wage received from the owner of a plantation for his entire time, the princely sum of thirty cents a month, and the salt for his corn cakes (tortillas)! Here where people cannot freeze, and anyone can get a banana to prevent starvation, a maintenance wage is very near to zero.

Burden Bearing

It is pitiful to see human beings doing the labor that belongs to beasts or machines. Yonder goes a strong man with a burden of two hundred pounds on his back, which he will carry for four or five days till he reaches his destination, only to get another as heavy to bring back, and then repeat the task indefinitely. Behind him trots his wife with a hundred pounds or more, from which even the exigencies of maternity do not excuse her. It not infrequently happens that a babe is born scores of miles away from

home, with only the loss of an hour or two from the journey, the new mother after the short delay re-appearing with the new arrival hung on her back, while her loving lord and driver considerately takes most or all of her load in addition to his own, and all take up the heavy hopeless round again. Even the little tot of four or five goes trotting along with his eight inch steps, crying sometimes, for it is very hard to keep up with **Tat** (father) and **Nan** (mother), but he must learn, for that is the only school he will ever have to train him for the wretched servitude called life, to which he is fated. All this they have endured for generations. What a race of people! With Christianity, freedom and education they would make one of the cleanest and finest races under the sun, but without the Gospel their outlook is as hopeless as despair itself.

**Moral and
Religious
Condition**

Both earlier and later records of Indian life show that they have always been weak in the matter of abstinence from strong drink. Their own tribal authorities

often try to keep away from the saloon, but conditions are all against them. Both the extensive sugar cane and not a little of the fruit crop are manufactured into brandy. A drink costs less than a cent and a thorough intoxication less than a nickel. The saloons give the left overs in the glasses to the Indians, the drink demon arouses and they spend their last hard earned cent for "burning water". It is not disgraceful. The Indian believes brandy is a good substitute for food, for medicine, even for trouble. In religious festivals they must have brandy even if everything else is wanting. A fermented fruit brandy called "chicha" is much used by the Indians, and produces the most frightful results on the health of its victims. In 1913 there were 56,200 saloon licenses issued by the Government, or one to every thirty-six inhabitants, counting men, women and children, for all drink, besides an enormous though unknown amount of "moonshine". We have seen mothers treating their children and even their sucking babes. On religious feast days in Indian districts, the roads out of town are fairly ahowl with Indians in all stages of

intoxication. You may see little children crying because **Tat** and **Nan** are both in the gutter, and the problem of looking after them is too much for the baby mind. In the redemption of the Indian from this his principal vice, no help can be expected from the Government because of the Devil's old sophism of the revenue. Nor does a single ray of light break from the Catholic Church. She fattens on sin, and liquor is a fruitful mother of holy revenue. Then too the "holy father" is often the star consumer of the stuff, holding the drinking record of the town. The best priest in the country confessed to the writer that "when an Indian takes to liquor, nothing can save him, he is gone." There is but one hope, and that shines clear and strong—their evangelization. This has been tried and does the work. The Indian earnestness with which they take to the Gospel gives them an almost certain victory. Again we exclaim, What a field for mission work!

Other Weaknesses

In spite of better instincts, in those towns where liquor, that universal solvent of virtue, has effected its ravages, un-

chastity also prevails to an alarming extent. Though the Indian is temperamentally honest, the cruelty of his servitude, the hopelessness of his outlook, and the injustice of his treatment breaks his sense of right, and he feels justified in frequent dishonesty. After universal abuse of his frankness, he has taken refuge in systematic deception, and lives a secret life for himself and his people, and a quite different one for the outer world. Their religious life is shot through with superstition, and the Church keeps them so, where she has control, for a superstitious Indian town is easiest governed and exploited. Since, then, their fearful moral condition is rooted in liquor and the Church, we come back again from this side to the fact that the only hope for them is their evangelization, and hence the responsibility rests directly upon us.

Indian Education

The Liberal Government is making efforts to educate Indian children, but finds much difficulty, because it does not enjoy the confidence of the Indian, who for that reason uses every artifice in his power to evade educa-

tion; because his children after learning to read and write are taken from the family and compelled to render literary service for the State on a starvation wage; and chiefly because the main failings of the Indian are moral failings, and the Government schools are professedly irreligious, and hence fail in moral force. Since the Government cannot and the Church will not educate them, their only hope here also is the Gospel, which has been tried and proved capable of doing the work. They want to learn in order to read the Bible.

Spanish Evangeliza- tion

Were the Indians ever evangelized? The chief aim of the Spanish adventurers who conquered the country was to get gold, by violence, and we may legitimately look with suspicion upon a propaganda based upon such a foundation. The Gospel of peace is not the kind that is propagated by the sword, by burning alive brave men who fight in defense of their country, by unscrupulously robbing its "converts" of all they possess, and reducing them to the most insupportable servi-

tude, the priest mostly cooperating in the whole criminal proceeding, and claiming and assuming all moral and spiritual responsibility. Even at the best the faith brought to the Indians, was the very type of religion that had just been repudiated by all northern Europe, as pernicious and destructive of all that was noblest and best in man. It was the Gospel that Luther found ninety-five serious objections to. It was the Gospel of Tetzels, of Philip II, of Torquemada, of Domingo de Guzman, of the Inquisition. It came to the New World with its idolatry, its indulgences, its dungeons and racks, its absorption of human rights, its superstition and blight, and maintained its grip, till in 1871 the people of Guatemala reached the stage of degeneration and tyranny, where humanity could endure no more, and the Catholic people of Guatemala arose against their own Church and hurled her out of her throne, and gave the nation such a decided agnostic bent, that the Church until now has never recovered. Were the Indians evangelized? It is the veriest irony to speak of such a religion carried by such men with such motives and

practices as evangelizing anything. We have neither biblical nor logical warrant for so outrageous an abuse of a plain English word.

Uplift Work for the Indian

Probably nowhere on the globe is a general uplift work more needed than among the Guatemala Indians. The unspeakable living conditions in which they exist, their squalor, high mortality, ignorant motherhood, insanitation, abject ideals of human existence, and their general hopelessness call for a life wide work, such as neither the Government, the Church nor any other factor now in the field, save the Gospel can give. The evangelizing and general uplift work of our Mission should be steadily pushed. Each year our Bethany Nurses' Training School is sending out a little class of trained nurses to go among the people and tell them how to keep their homes clean, and the relation of health to cleanliness and sobriety. Some of these may go among the Indians. We hope ere long to have some Indian representatives among the nurses, who may teach their people how to take

care of the sick, avoid disease, rear their children, and prevent the spread of contagious disease. With the Gospel will come an improvement of moral and industrial conditions. Again the responsibility comes home to us, for our Mission is the only agency that has the fundamental remedy.

The Supreme Need What the Indian most profoundly needs is the very thing that a mistaken

American Protestantism almost always takes it for granted that he has, not differential theology at all, but the simplest fundamental elements of Christianity. It is true they have many of the religious terms that represent these things to us, but so warped and atrophied that they no more carry the Christian conception to them than if any other word were used. We must divest ourselves of the idea that Christianity consists of words. We cannot feed a starving man on a grocery catalogue, nor a starving soul on letters of the alphabet. To the Indian with all his Catholic training, God is not a sympathizing, care-taking, hand-leading heavenly

Father, but a powerful absentee divinity, less sympathetic, and even more inaccessible than Dai Butz, Huitzilopóchtli, or Onkelonkelú. Christ is not the tender pitying Redeemer of mankind who walks with us and talks with us and tells us we are His own, but a cake on the altar that he takes his hat off to, and eats. The Holy Ghost is not the Comforter, the Companion, the heavenly light, but either the personal property of the Pope, or a silver or tin trinket to adorn an altar. Sin to the Indian is not rebellion against an infinite Love and a law-governed universe and its Maker, it is only an entry on the wrong side of the ledger, an unfavorable deal, a bad bargain for a dozen eggs in the market. Repentance in Indian practice has not a speaking acquaintance with the Christian saving grace taught by Christ, but is merely a commercial transaction, a **quid pro quo**, a balancing of accounts. Faith is not an intelligent appreciation and acceptance of Divine mercy and grace, but the blindest and most stupid and reprehensible credulity, systematically fostered by those in whose interest it operates. For four hundred years Catholicism has

tried to feed the starving Indian soul on an institution, while he craved a personality, and the result is one of the most stupendous failures the world has ever seen. It is time Christianity came to the rescue with the A B C of the Gospel.

Resumé of Reasons for Evangeliza- tion

The Indian needs our help, because many of the same superstitions and practices that held before the conquest are still kept up, and some of the old idols are still in use; because the images of the saints, the Virgin Christ and the old Indian gods are sometimes used interchangeably by the same worshippers; because their superstitions have a cause and effect relation to their political, social, moral and spiritual perdition; because the drunkenness and unchastity and injustice found in the priesthood ruins their influence for good, and destroys the hope of relief from that source; because the Government is professedly agnostic and hence lacks the spiritual factor in its work; because the fire of civilization that has smouldered so long in the Indian soul, needs but the Gospel to flame

out again into life and power; because the Guatemala Indians have extraordinary capabilities; because having the Gospel we would be criminally responsible if we failed to give it to them; because if we do not give it to them, there is no one in sight who will.

Effect of the Gospel on Indian Life

It is impossible to describe the quiet, philosophical type of joy that pervades the being, and shines from the face of the Indian, when he comes to realize that there is indeed for him a great sympathetic, all powerful, personal God and friend and that he has actually got into enduring touch with Him. When his deeply religious soul at last finds its normal life, his wonder and joy passes all bounds, and his spiritual power becomes correspondingly great. Before it the hitherto invincible demon of alcohol disappears like the mists in his native valleys before the power of the tropical sun. For him a personal Saviour is not a theological tenet, but a living personality and companionship. He looks upon his former condition as upon a man that

no longer is, and on his present self as on a man that was not but has come to be, as if there was no connection whatever between the two. True faith in the Indian becomes intense, absolute. Normal religion becomes at last the great thing of life for which he lives, nay it is life for him. It cost much to get them started in the road of redemption, but they are like sheep, as soon as one goes over the bar, the rest make haste to follow. They are beginning to realize that the better conditions that they have blindly sought for ages are now knocking at their doors. At last they have found a Friend! A few examples will illustrate and confirm what we have said.

Pedro Poz An Indian of Suníl
had a wayward son
named Pedro, whom
he put into military service as a
punishment for his wild life. While
there Pedro came in contact with
the Gospel and was converted. On
release he not only abstained from
his former iniquities, but opened his
house for services in his native
tongue, bought lamps and benches,
and before we knew it had a meet-
ing of over thirty Indians to whom

he was preaching regularly. Learning of his zeal, a young American from Aurora, Ill., by looking after his support made it possible for him to devote one-half his time to the work his heart was in, and later he was taken on for full time. For several years he has been preaching the Gospel in his own and surrounding towns with splendid results. His reformation has been so complete and striking, his life is becoming so strong and influential, and his devotion to the cause so absolute, that God alone knows what a life of power and blessing is before him. Without the Gospel that wonderful man would still be a drunken worthless Indian.

Indians of San Antonio

Some Indians from Sunil, down on a coast plantation, heard that at San Antonio, six miles away, there were Gospel meetings, and began to attend and interest others of their people. Soon more than fifty of them were regular attendants. The plantation owner, a fanatical Catholic, learning of it, sent them all back to their native town to get them away from Protestantism, and had

fifty new ones sent down. Those who were sent home found Gospel meetings there in their own language, and the new ones in the plantation began to attend at San Antonio. The outwitted planter prepared to punish the chief believers, but just then his son came home and said to him, "Father, all who follow that religion stop getting drunk, work better, give full days, don't fight and can be relied on. It is more for our interest that they should go there." The father soon found his son was right, and since then he himself reminds the Indians when preaching day comes. The number of attendants has again risen to over fifty though they have to tramp six miles and back, after dark, often through rain, and crossing three dangerous rivers in flood season.

An Abstinence Funeral

The unevangelized Indian celebrates his funerals with a big brandy wake, hence fights, wounds, and sometimes another death as a consequence. They must get permission of the plantation owner to bury their dead in a land that was once all

their own. One of our Indian believers lost his only son by fever. For the funeral he called in some fifteen of his fellow evangelicals, and without a drop of liquor held a religious service, and thence bore the body solemnly away for burial. Now the plantation owner had just had some annoying experiences with loss of employees, imprisonments, attendance at court, etc., in consequence of the previous funeral, and had decided to refuse henceforth all permission for funerals. So our Indian father was flatly refused permission to bury his son. His reply to the owner ranks as a classic piece of testimony: "Señor, your objection is well grounded, for that is what comes from the use of 'burning water.' But all we who are here are Evangelicals, and not one of us drinks liquor. Examine for yourself and see if any one here has a bottle, if any one of us has the stench of liquor on him. We come to bury our dead decently as Christians." The owner to his lasting surprise found it true, and gladly gave his permission for the first Christian funeral he had ever witnessed. Since then he is loud in his praise of a religion that can do such things "even for Indi-

ans." It was his first contact with the Gospel of the Living Christ.

Vision

In Guatemala the greater part of the inhabitants, the best fundamental qualities of character, the greatest capabilities, the finest material for future development belong to the aborigines, and even in the mixed race the Indian blood prevails. This work is or should be mainly an Indian work, as fast as we can get into it, for the Indian is the key to the nation's evangelization. The priests recognize this and sometimes say to us, "You may have the Ladino, but keep your hands off the Indians." Now it is among them that good strategy calls for our supreme effort. When, among them, this agelong soul hunger is satisfied, when these capabilities are developed, when this latent power is consecrated to God and they have become a redeemed, enlightened, civilized nation, who save Heaven itself may set the limit of their progress, or define the extent of their influence upon the world's redemption.

Rev. Edward M. Haymaker.

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